Culturally Responsive Teaching

Teacher and Students Producing Together
Facilitate learning through joint productive activity among teacher and students.

Learning occurs most effectively when experts and novices work together for a common product or goal, and are therefore motivated to assist one another. "Providing assistance" is the general definition of teaching; thus, joint productive activity (JPA) maximizes teaching and learning. Working together allows conversation, which teaches language, meaning, and values in the context of immediate issues. Teaching and learning through "joint productive activity" is cross-cultural, typically human, and probably "hard-wired." This kind of "mentoring" and "learning in action" is characteristic of parents with very young children; of pre-school, graduate school, adult learning, school-to-work and service learning, on-the-job training -- of all education, except the common K-12 tradition. In schools, there is ordinarily little joint activity from which common experiences emerge, and therefore no common context that allows students to develop common systems of understanding with the teacher and with one another. Joint activity between teacher and students helps create such a common context of experience within the school itself. This is especially important when the teacher and the students are not of the same background.

Joint activity and discourse allow the highest level of academic achievement: using formal, "schooled," or "scientific" ideas to solve practical, real world problems. The constant connection of schooled concepts and everyday concepts is basic to the process by which mature schooled thinkers understand the world. These joint activities should be shared by both students and teachers. Only when the teacher also shares the experiences can the kind of discourse take place that builds basic schooled competencies.

Indicators of Joint Productive Activity

The teacher:

1. designs instructional activities requiring student collaboration to accomplish a joint product.
2. matches the demands of the joint productive activity to the time available for accomplishing them.
3. arranges classroom seating to accommodate students' individual and group needs to communicate and work jointly.
4. participates with students in joint productive activity.
5. organizes students in a variety of groupings, such as by friendship, mixed academic ability, language, project, or interests, to promote interaction.
6. plans with students how to work in groups and move from one activity to another, such as from large group introduction to small group activity, for clean-up, dismissal, and the like.
7. manages student and teacher access to materials and technology to facilitate joint productive activity.
8. monitors and supports student collaboration in positive ways.

Developing Language Across the Curriculum
Develop competence in the language and literacy of instruction across the curriculum.

Developing competence in the language(s) of instruction should be a meta-goal of all educational activity throughout the school day. Whether instruction is bilingual or monolingual, literacy is the most fundamental competency necessary for school success. School knowledge, and thinking itself, are inseparable from language. Everyday social language, formal academic language, and subject matter lexicons are all critical for school success.

Language development at all levels -- informal, problem-solving, and academic -- should be fostered through use and through purposeful, deliberate conversation between teacher and

students, not through drills and decontextualized rules. Reading and writing must be taught both as specific curricula and integrated into each content area.

The ways of using language that prevail in school discourse, such as ways of asking and answering questions, challenging claims, and using representations, are frequently unfamiliar to English language learners and other students at risk of educational failure. However, their own culturally based ways of talking can be effectively linked to the language used for academic disciplines by building learning contexts that evoke and build upon children's language strengths.

The development of language and literacy as a meta-goal also applies to the specialized language genres required for the study of science, mathematics, history, art, and literature. Effective mathematics learning is based on the ability to "speak mathematics," just as the overall ability to achieve across the curriculum is dependent on mastery of the language of instruction. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and lexicons can be taught and learned in every subject matter, and indeed all the subject matters can be taught as though they were a second language. Joint Productive Activity provides an ideal venue for developing the language of the activity's domain.

Indicators of Language Development

The teacher:

1. listens to student talk about familiar topics such as home and community.
2. responds to students' talk and questions, making 'in-flight' changes during conversation that directly relate to students' comments.
3. assists written and oral language development through modeling, eliciting, probing, restating, clarifying, questioning, praising, etc., in purposeful conversation and writing.
4. interacts with students in ways that respect students' preferences for speaking that may be different from the teacher's, such as wait-time, eye contact, turn-taking, or spotlighting.
5. connects student language with literacy and content area knowledge through speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities.
6. encourages students to use content vocabulary to express their understanding.
7. provides frequent opportunity for students to interact with each other and the teacher during instructional activities.
8. encourages students' use of first and second languages in instructional activities.

Making Meaning: Connecting School to Students' Lives
Connect teaching and curriculum to students' experiences and skills of home and community.

The high literacy goals of schools are best achieved in everyday, culturally meaningful contexts. This contextualization utilizes students' funds of knowledge and skills as a foundation for new knowledge. This approach fosters pride and confidence as well as greater school achievement.

Increase in contextualized instruction is a consistent recommendation of education researchers. Schools typically teach rules, abstractions, and verbal descriptions, and they teach by means of rules, abstractions, and verbal descriptions. Schools need to assist at-risk students by providing experiences that show abstract concepts are drawn from and applied to the everyday world.

"Understanding" means connecting new learning to previous knowledge. Assisting students make these connections strengthens newly acquired knowledge and increases student engagement with learning activities. Schema theorists, cognitive scientists, behaviorists, and psychological anthropologists agree that school learning is made meaningful by connecting it to students' personal, family, and community experiences. Effective education teaches how school abstractions are drawn from and applied to the everyday world. Collaboration with parents and communities can reveal appropriate patterns of participation, conversation, knowledge, and interests that will make literacy, numeracy, and science meaningful to all students.

Indicators of Contextualization

The teacher:

1. begins activities with what students already know from home, community, and school.
2. designs instructional activities that are meaningful to students in terms of local community norms and knowledge.
3. acquires knowledge of local norms and knowledge by talking to students, parents or family members, community members, and by reading pertinent documents.
4. assists students to connect and apply their learning to home and community.
5. plans jointly with students to design community-based learning activities.
6. provides opportunities for parents or families to participate in classroom instructional activities.
7. varies activities to include students' preferences, from collective and cooperative to individual and competitive.
8. varies styles of conversation and participation to include students' cultural preferences, such as co-narration, call-and-response, and choral, among others.

Teaching Complex Thinking
Challenge students toward cognitive complexity.

Students at risk of educational failure, particularly those of limited standard English proficiency, are often forgiven any academic challenges on the assumption that they are of limited ability, or they are forgiven any genuine assessment of progress because the assessment tools are inadequate. Thus, both standards and feedback are weakened, with the predictable result that achievement is impeded. While such policies may often be the result of benign motives, the effect is to deny many diverse students the basic requirements of progress -- high academic standards and meaningful assessment that allows feedback and responsive assistance.

There is a clear consensus among education researchers that students at risk of educational failure require instruction that is cognitively challenging; that is, instruction that requires thinking and analysis, not only rote, repetitive, detail-level drills. This does not mean ignoring phonics rules, or not memorizing the multiplication tables, but it does mean going beyond that level of curriculum into the exploration of the deepest possible reaches of interesting and meaningful materials. There are many ways in which cognitive complexity has been introduced into the teaching of students at risk of educational failure. There is good reason to believe, for instance, that a bilingual curriculum itself provides cognitive challenges that make it superior to a monolingual approach.

Working with a cognitively challenging curriculum requires careful leveling of tasks, so that students are motivated to stretch. It does not mean drill-and-kill exercises, nor it does not mean overwhelming challenges that discourage effort. Getting the correct balance and providing appropriate assistance is, for the teacher, a truly cognitively challenging task.

Indicators of Challenging Activities

The teacher:

1. assures that students - for each instructional topic - see the whole picture as a basis for understanding the parts.
2. presents challenging standards for student performance.
3. designs instructional tasks that advance student understanding to more complex levels.
4. assists students to accomplish more complex understanding by building from their previous success.
5. gives clear, direct feedback about how student performance compares with the challenging standards.

Teaching Through Conversation
Engage students through dialogue, especially the Instructional Conversation.

Thinking, and the abilities to form, express, and exchange ideas are best taught through dialogue, through questioning and sharing ideas and knowledge. In the Instructional Conversation (IC), the teacher listens carefully, makes guesses about intended meaning, and adjusts responses to assist students' efforts--just as in graduate seminars, or between mothers and toddlers. Here the teacher relates formal, school knowledge to the student's individual, family, and community knowledge. The IC provides opportunities for the development of the languages of instruction and subject matter. IC is a supportive and collaborative event that builds intersubjectivity and a sense of community. IC achieves individualization of instruction; is best practiced during joint productive activity; is an ideal setting for language development; and allows sensitive contextualization, and precise, stimulating cognitive challenge.

This concept may appear to be a paradox; instruction implies authority and planning, while conversation implies equality and responsiveness. But the instructional conversation is based on assumptions that are fundamentally different from those of traditional lessons. Teachers who use it, like parents in natural teaching, assume that the student has something to say beyond the known answers in the head of the adult. The adult listens carefully, makes guesses about the intended meaning, and adjusts responses to assist the student's efforts - in other words, engages in conversation. Such conversation reveals the knowledge, skills, and values - the culture - of the learner, enabling the teacher to contextualize teaching to fit the learner's experience base.

In U.S. schools the instructional conversation is rare. More often, teaching is through the recitation script, in which the teacher repeatedly assigns and assesses. Classrooms and schools are transformed into communities of learners through such dialogic teaching, and when teachers reduce the distance between themselves and their students by constructing lessons from common understanding of each others' experience and ideas and make teaching a warm, interpersonal and collaborative activity.

Indicators of Instructional Conversation

The teacher:

1. arranges the classroom to accommodate conversation between the teacher and a small group of students on a regular and frequent basis.
2. has a clear academic goal that guides conversation with students.
3. ensures that student talk occurs at higher rates than teacher talk.
4. guides conversation to include students' views, judgments, and rationales using text evidence and other substantive support.
5. ensures that all students are included in the conversation according to their preferences.
6. listens carefully to assess levels of students' understanding.
7. assists students' learning throughout the conversation by questioning, restating, praising, encouraging, etc.
8. guides the students to prepare a product that indicates the Instructional Conversation's goal was achieved.